

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A fastener assembly comprising:

a fastening element; and

a fastener comprising:

a base;

a housing connected to the base and including an opening, the housing adapted to retain the fastening element when the fastening element is inserted in the housing; and

a latch flexibly connected to a region a flexible portion of the base located on an open side of the housing such that the latch can be moved relative to the housing and positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference between a portion of the latch and with a lateral surface of the fastening element, the latch including a surface that is proximate thean opening in the housing, wherein ~~each of the flexible portion of the base and~~ the surface is externally accessible with the fastening element retained in the housing, the latch configured such that the fastening element is inhibited from being removed from the housing absent an application of a force applied to the surface proximate the opening to flex the latchflexible portion of the base,

wherein the latch is constructed to locate the portion of the latch between the region of the base to which the latch is flexibly connected and a location of the fastening element when the fastening element is retained in the housing.

2. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the base includes a flange and wherein the housing and the latch are both connected to the flange.

3. (Original) The fastener of claim 2, wherein the flange is configured so that it can be connected to a sheet of material.
4. (Original) The fastener of claim 3, wherein each of the flange and sheet of material comprise a thermoplastic and the flange and sheet of material are heat sealed together.
5. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the housing comprises a side wall and a retaining lip.
6. (Original) The fastener of claim 5, wherein the retaining lip comprises a notch to accommodate a fastening element attachment mechanism.
7. (Original) The fastener of claim 5, wherein the side wall comprises a semi-circular section.
8. (Canceled)
9. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the latch is flexible.
10. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the latch comprises a flange generally parallel to a base of the housing and projecting towards the interior of the housing.
11. (Currently Amended) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the portion of the latch comprises a portion includes a contour corresponding to the a shape of the fastening element.
12. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the fastener is formed in a sheet of material.
13. (Currently Amended) A fastener assembly, comprising:
a fastening element; and

a fastener comprising:

a base;

a housing connected to the base and including an opening, the housing sized and adapted to retain the fastening element; and

a latch flexibly connected to a region flexible portion of the base located on an open side of the housing such that the latch can be moved relative to the housing and positioned relative to the housing so that the latch in combination with the housing retains the fastening element, the latch including a surface that is proximate ~~an~~the opening in the housing, wherein ~~each of the flexible portion of the base and~~ the surface is externally accessible with the fastening element retained in the housing, the latch configured such that the fastening element is inhibited from being removed from the housing absent an application of a force applied to the surface proximate the opening to flex the latchflexible portion of the base.

14. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the fastening element is flexible.

15. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the housing is flexible.

16 -17. (Canceled)

18. (Currently Amended) A fastener that can be attached to a first surface, comprising:

a base;

a housing connected to the base, the housing comprising a retaining lip having a second surface, at least a portion of the second surface being substantially parallel to the first surface, the housing being sized and adapted to retain a fastening element; and

a latch flexibly connected to a region of the base located on an open side of the housing and positioned relative to the housing such that the latch in combination with the housing retains

the fastening element, wherein the latch comprises a first portion to which pressure is applied when the fastening element is moved into engagement with the fastener and a second portion comprising a third surface disposed intermediate the first surface and the second surface upon which the fastening element rests when in an engaged position, at least a portion of the third surface being substantially parallel to the first surface, wherein the first portion is externally accessible with the fastening element retained in connection to the base external to the housing.

19. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the base includes a flange and wherein the housing and the latch are both connected to the flange.

20. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 19, wherein the flange is configured so that it can be connected to a sheet of material.

21. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 20, wherein each of the flange and the sheet of material comprise a thermoplastic, and wherein the flange and the sheet of material are configured to be heat sealed together.

22. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the housing comprises a side wall and a retaining lip.

23. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 22, wherein the retaining lip comprises a notch to accommodate a fastening element attachment mechanism.

24. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 22, wherein the side wall comprises a semi-circular section.

25. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the housing is flexible.

26. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the latch is flexible.
27. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the latch comprises a flange generally parallel to the base, the latch projecting towards an interior of the housing.
28. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the base includes a flange connected to both the housing and the latch, and wherein the flange is made of thermoplastic.
29. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the base includes a flange connected to both the housing and the latch, and wherein the flange and an inflatable bladder are heat sealed together.
30. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the housing comprises a side wall and a retaining lip.
31. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 30, wherein the retaining lip comprises a notch to accommodate a fastening element attachment mechanism.
32. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 30, wherein the side wall comprises a semi-circular section.
33. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the latch comprises a portion corresponding to a shape of the fastening element.
34. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the latch is positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference with a lateral surface of the fastening element.

35-54. (Canceled)

55. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the fastener is attached to an object and the flexible portion of the base flexes in a direction of the object.

56-61. (Canceled)

62. (Currently Amended) A fastener assembly comprising:

a fastening element; and

a fastener comprising:

a base having a flexible portion;

a housing connected to the base and including an opening; and

a latch flexibly connected to the flexible portion of the base; and

a housing connected to the base, wherein the housing is adapted to retain the
fastening element so that a surface of the latch located proximate the an opening in the
housing ~~and the flexible portion of the base are each~~ is externally accessible with the fastening
element retained in the housing such that a force can be applied to the surface to ~~flex the flexible~~
~~portion of the base~~depress the latch,

wherein the latch includes a portion that is positioned relative to the housing to retain the
fastening element by interference with a lateral surface of the fastening element, and

wherein a location of the fastening element is centered about an axis perpendicular to the
fastener when the fastening element is retained in the housing, and wherein a distance between
the portion of the latch and the axis increases when the force is applied to the surface proximate
the opening to depress the latch.

63. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the base includes a flange and
wherein the housing and the latch are both connected to the flange.

64. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 63, wherein the flange is configured so that it can be connected to a sheet of material.

65. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 64, wherein each of the flange and sheet of material comprise a corresponding thermoplastic and the flange and sheet of material are sealed together.

66. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the housing comprises a side wall and a retaining lip.

67. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 66, wherein the retaining lip comprises a notch to accommodate a fastening element attachment mechanism.

68. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 66, wherein the side wall comprises a semi-circular section.

69. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the latch is flexible.

70. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the latch comprises a flange generally parallel to the base of the housing and projecting towards an interior of the housing.

71. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the latch comprises a portion corresponding to the shape of the fastening element.

72. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the fastener is formed in a sheet of material.

73. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the housing is configured such that the latch is accessible such that an external force can be applied by an operator's finger to depress the latch.

74. (Cancelled)

75. (Currently Amended) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the fastener is configured to permit the fastening element to be withdrawn from the housing over the latch ~~and the flexible portion of the base.~~

76. (Currently Amended) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the fastener is configured such that the region~~flexible~~ portion of the base remains externally accessible with the fastening element retained in the housing and the fastener coupled to an object.

77. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 76, wherein the object includes an inflatable bladder.

78. (Currently Amended) The fastener assembly of claim 77, wherein the fastener assembly is coupled to the inflatable bladder, and wherein a resistance provided by an inflation level of the inflatable bladder resists the force applied to the surface proximate the opening to flex the latch~~flexible~~ portion of the base.

79. (Currently Amended) A fastener assembly, comprising:
a fastening element; and
a fastener, comprising:
a base ~~having a flexible portion;~~
a housing connected to the base and including a retaining lip ~~and an opening~~, the housing sized and adapted to retain the fastening element; and
a latch flexibly connected to ~~the flexible portion a region of the base located on an open~~

side of the housing such that the latch can be moved relative to the housing, the latch and
positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element within the housing upon sliding
the fastening element under the retaining lip,

wherein the latchflexible portion of the base is manually depressible relative to the
fastening element to permit the fastening element to be slid out of the housing over the flexible
portion of the base and the latch and the region of the base.

80. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 79, wherein the base is configured
so that it can be connected to a sheet of material.

81. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 80, wherein the base includes a
thermoplastic, and wherein the base is configured so that it can be heat sealed to the sheet of
material.

82. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 79, wherein the retaining lip
comprises a notch to accommodate a fastening element attachment mechanism.

83. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 79, wherein the base is configured
to be connected a bladder.

84. (Currently Amended) The fastener assembly of claim 83, wherein the latchbase is
configured such that the flexible portion of the base latch flexes in a direction of the bladder.

85. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 79, wherein the latch is configured
relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference with a lateral surface of the
fastening element.

86. (Currently Amended) The fastener assembly of claim 79, wherein the fastener is configured such that the latchflexible portion of the base remains externally accessible with the fastening element retained in the housing and the fastener coupled to an object.

87. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 86, wherein the object includes an inflatable bladder.

88. (Currently Amended) The fastener assembly of claim 87, wherein the fastener assembly is coupled to the inflatable bladder, and wherein a resistance provided by an inflation level of the inflatable bladder resists a force applied to flex the latchflexible portion of the base.

89. (New) The fastener assembly of claim 1, wherein the location of the fastening element is centered about an axis perpendicular to the fastener when the fastening element is retained in the housing, and wherein a distance between the portion of the latch and the axis increases when the force is applied to the surface proximate the opening to flex the latch.

90. (New) The fastener of claim 13, wherein the latch includes a portion that is positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference with a surface of the fastening element, and wherein the latch is constructed to locate the portion of the latch between the region of the base to which the latch is flexibly connected and a location of the fastening element when the fastening element is retained in the housing.

91. (New) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the latch includes a portion that is positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference with a surface of the fastening element, and wherein a location of the fastening element is centered about an axis perpendicular to the fastener when the fastening element is retained in the housing, and wherein a distance between the portion of the latch and the axis increases when the force is applied to the surface proximate the opening to flex the latch.

92. (New) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the latch is constructed to locate the portion of the latch between a region of the base to which the latch is flexibly connected and the location of the fastening element when the fastening element is retained in the housing.